

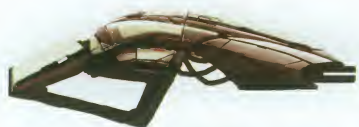




A GALAXY OF DETAILS

Minute details might be the last thing one would think of in the production of an epic videogame, but artists must design and build countless small objects to complete the illusion of a functioning world. Some of these objects have an obvious appeal, such as the arsenal of futuristic weapons strapped to Commander Shepard's armor. Others, like beds and computer stations, simply provide context and functionality to each area in the game, while reinforcing Mass Effect's sleek and futuristic art style through their unique designs.

04



GETH RIFLE

The primary weapon for geth troopers was designed to have a similar look to their starships, a long curving appearance that resembles an organic exoskeleton. Like all weapons in Mass Effect, the geth rifle folds down to a compact shape for storage.

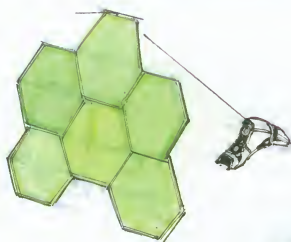






GETH DRONE

The drones were built and controlled by the geth, so they bear similar features—the single blue eye light and vaguely metallic surface.



HEX BARRIERS

This concept shows how the hex barriers were originally meant to be projected from stationary objects. This was later simplified by having the geth create the barriers directly



GETH HEAVY DRONE AND FLYER

The geth heavy drone (top) provided a fast-moving enemy, while the flyer (below) was designed to give normal geth troopers a raised platform for attacking the player. Ultimately, Saren would be the only character to use the flyer.



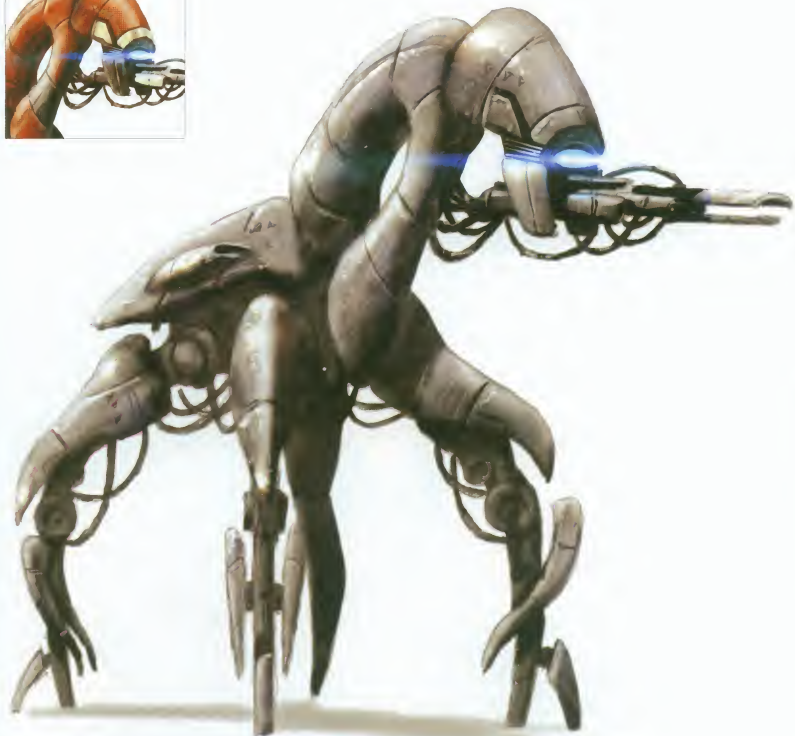
GETH TOWER

Incorporating shapes from other geth-made devices, these simple towers provided a high location from which to snipe.



GETH TURRET





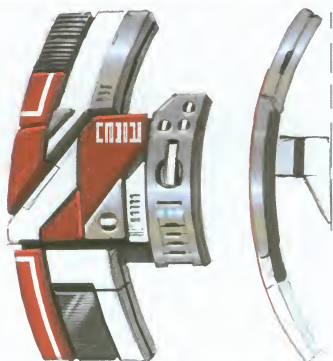
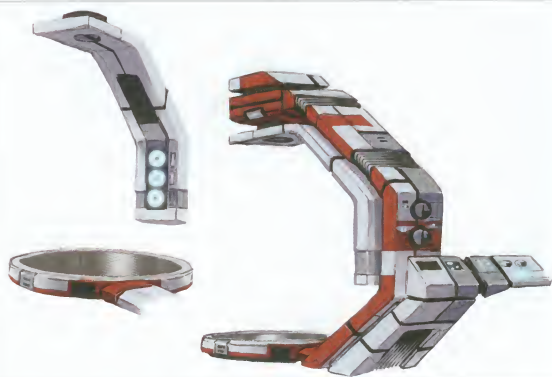
GETH ARMATURE

The geth have evolved into many distinct forms. To create the particularly large and dangerous enemies for *Mass Effect*, a four-legged giant was designed. The head-mounted turret was removed late in development to allow for omni-directional aiming.



ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

Mass Effect's design sense is particularly prominent in the equipment and appliances that detail the environment. Sweeping arcs meet straight lines to form elegant geometry that seems functional but futuristic.

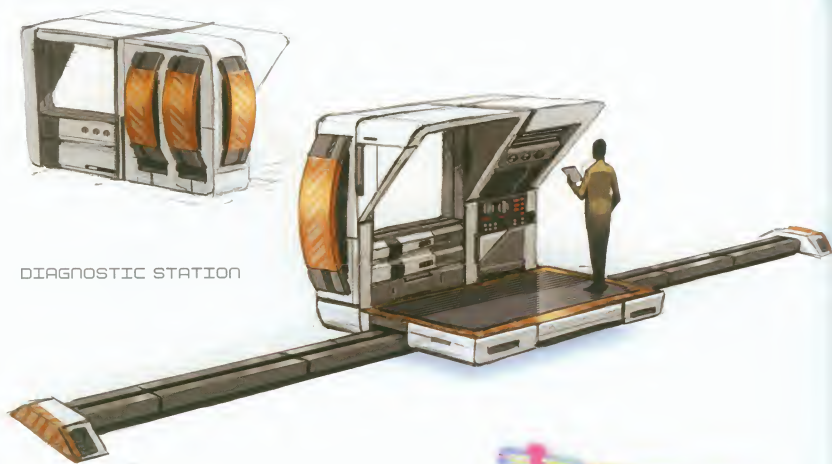




MINING GEAR

While the solar array (below) and drill (above) were primarily decorative, the barrier was heavily used to provide cover during combat.

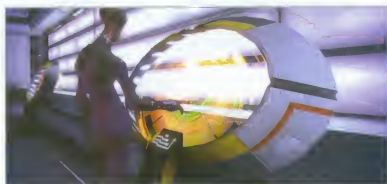
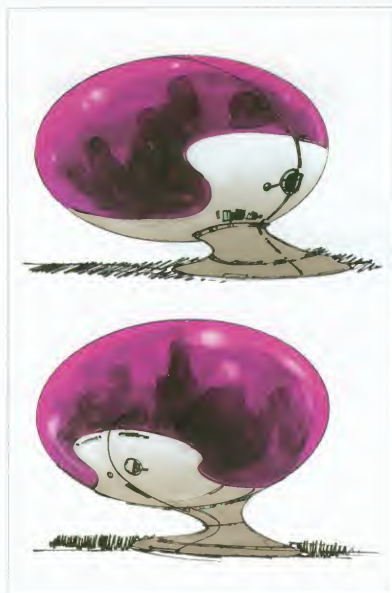




DIAGNOSTIC STATION

PLEASURE POD

The asari Consort makes use of these pods for privacy and comfort, but they were originally meant to hang from the ceilings of the Citadel's seedier establishments to showcase exotic dancers.



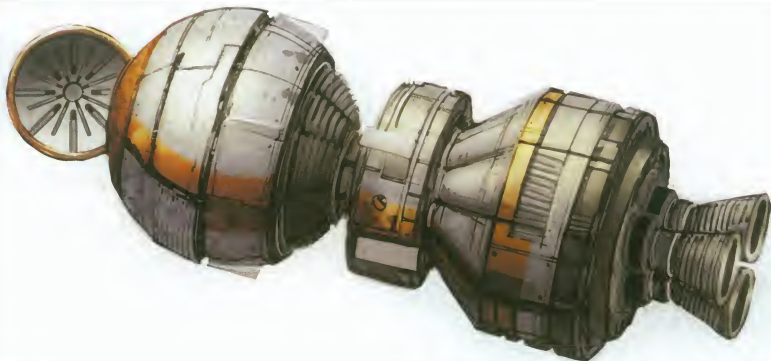
GAMING TABLES

TRANSMITTER TOWER



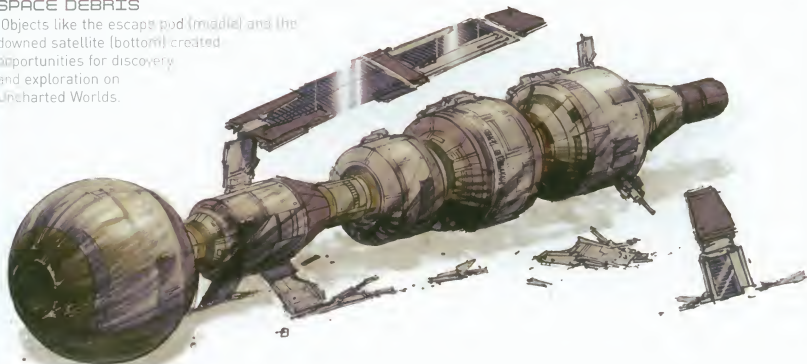
GENERIC APPLIANCE

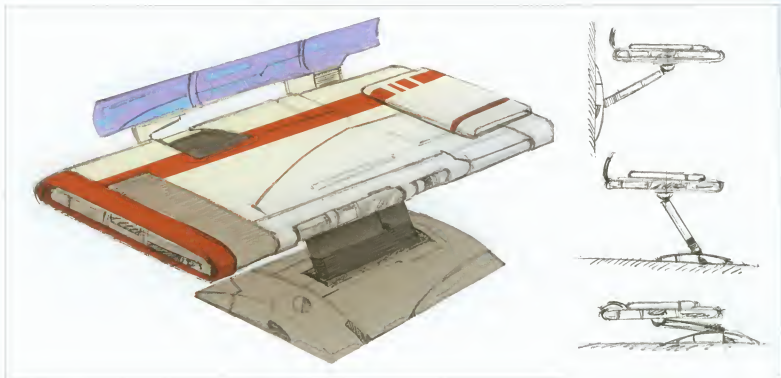
Sometimes objects without an obvious purpose are required, so designers can place them in the environment for players to use as interactive objects or tactical cover during combat.



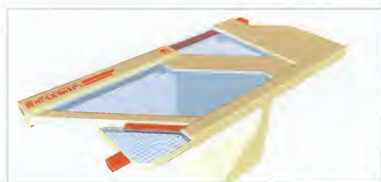
SPACE DEBRIS

Objects like the escape pod (middle) and the downed satellite (bottom) created opportunities for discovery and exploration on *Uncharted Worlds*.





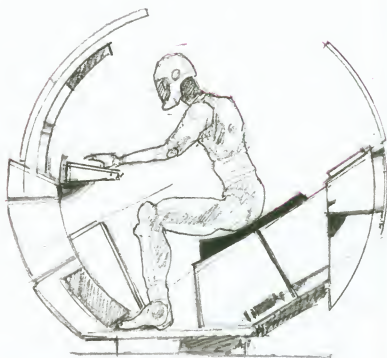
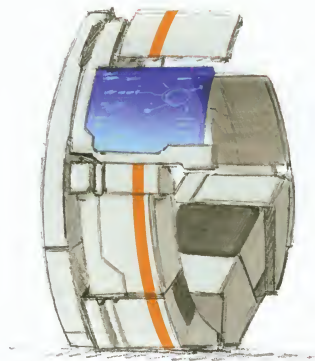
RETRACTABLE BED



DESKS

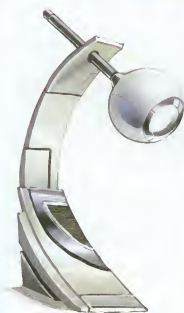


WORKSTATION



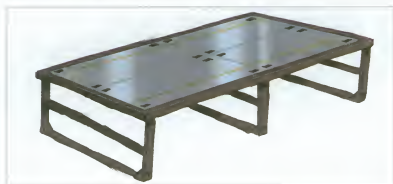
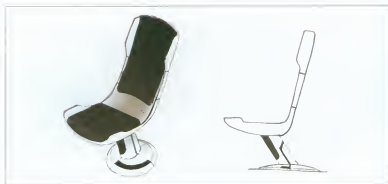
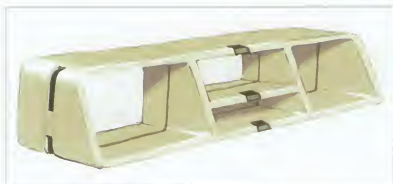


LOUNGE TABLE



DESK AND LAMP

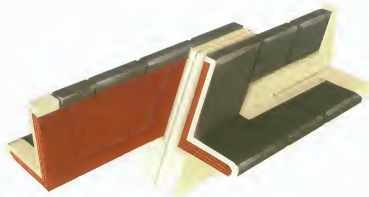




LIVING QUARTERS

Because players are free to explore a wide range of environments in *Mass Effect*, objects had to be built to detail everything from the exotic to the everyday. Even futuristic versions of desks, chairs, and shelves had to be made to flesh out the homes, offices, and living quarters of various characters.







HUMAN HELMETS

One of the most difficult designs turned out to be the human helmets. Because all human armors would share the same basic helmet design and the helmet would frame the characters' faces when they speak in close-ups, it was extremely important that the design was functional and visually appealing.





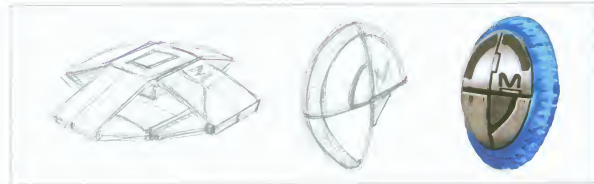
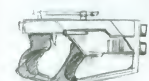
HUMAN HELMETS

To ensure that the characters' faces would be seen even while wearing a helmet, a clear visor and a chin guard that did not obscure the mouth were chosen.



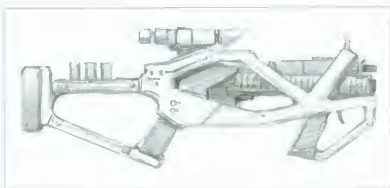
PISTOLS

Numerous variations on pistol designs were developed to find a balance between futuristic design and present-day notions of firepower. To create a look that's unique to Mass Effect, all weapons have two barrels, one atop the other.



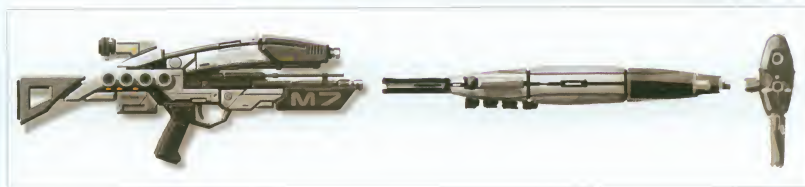
GRENADES

Since grenades in Mass Effect can fly in straight lines, they were given a compact disc-like shape.

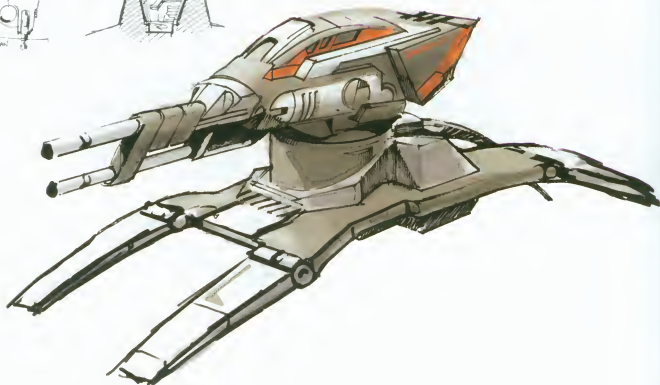
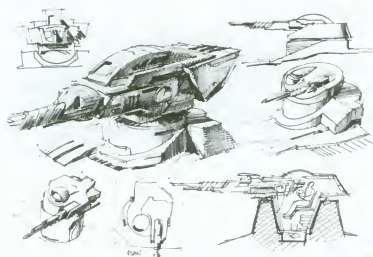


RIFLES

In keeping with *Mass Effect*'s heavy use of circular arcs, the upper body of the rifle is defined by a long curve. While some designs ignored this principle they still applied the double-barrel weapon design (top). The use of arcs is also prominent on the sniper rifle (bottom).



DRONES
AND TURRETS





SHOTGUNS

Though the mechanism would work entirely differently in the year 2183, a short-range, scatter-shot weapon was considered to be a valuable weapon for a Spectre's arsenal.

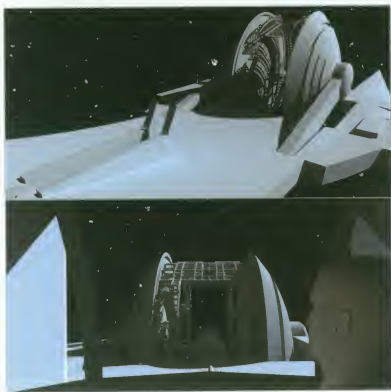
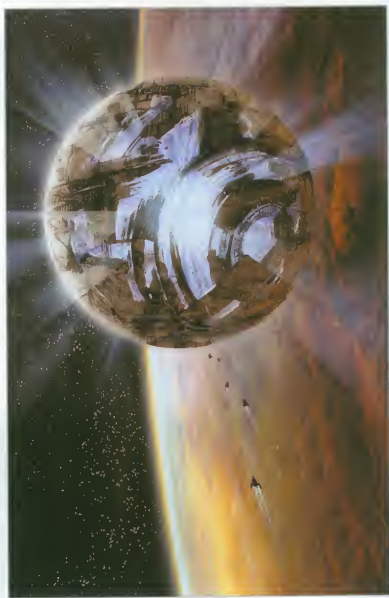
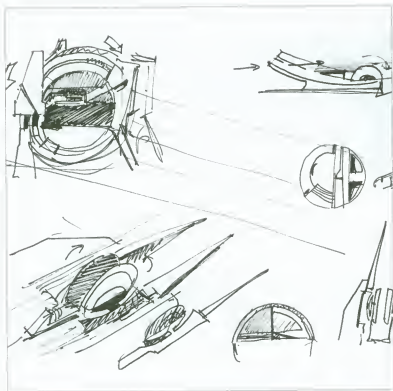
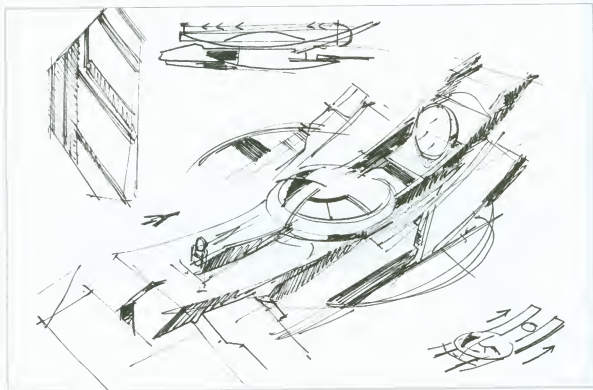
OMNI-TOOL

Designers felt that using technology-based attacks in combat was as important as using conventional weapons. The omni-tool allows characters to manipulate a holographic interface to instantly release these attacks, in addition to activating such non-combat capabilities as hacking electronic locks.



MASS RELAYS

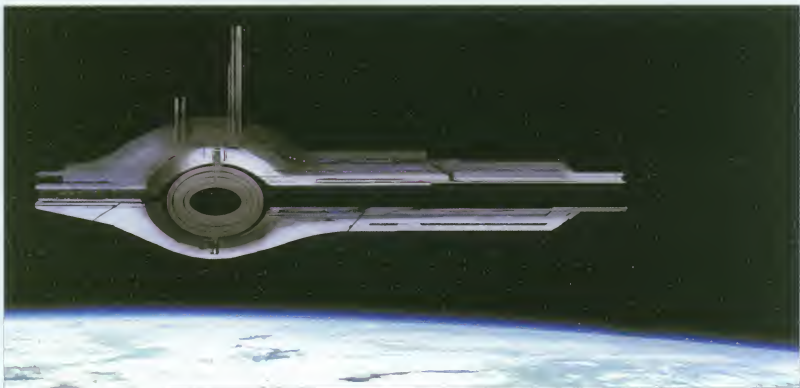
Throwing a starship across the galaxy is no small feat, and Mass Effect's writers and artists had to come up with a believable way to do that. Even after the pseudo-science was worked out, it was still unclear how they would visually realize it. Some ideas for mass relays were elaborate and mechanical, while others were more monolithic.





MASS RELAYS

The final design used heavy rotating rings to create the sensation of building power. Its tuning-fork shape appeared to focus the tremendous energy into a straight beam that could project a starship many light-years across the galaxy.





ALIEN WORLDS

In giving players a galaxy of places to explore, Mass Effect required the design of countless alien landscapes and architectural styles. The earliest concepts simply helped the team understand the basic style and format of the game itself. As the story developed, however, specific locations—such as the spectacular space station known as the Citadel—could be developed in great detail. Many of the early production paintings established the look of areas as they are seen in the final game, but as these images illustrate, the entire mood of some areas continued to change until very late in production.



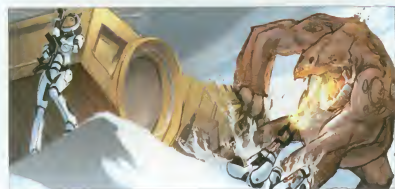


EARLY CONCEPTS

These paintings were done at the very beginning of the project, to help visualize the combat experience of Mass Effect. Though neither of these areas were built as shown, they established an overall style that can be seen throughout Mass Effect.







EARLY CONCEPTS

Even before the initial story outline was written, these early paintings explored ideas for interesting science fiction-inspired locations. In some cases, they inspired the design for planets that would eventually be built for Mass Effect.





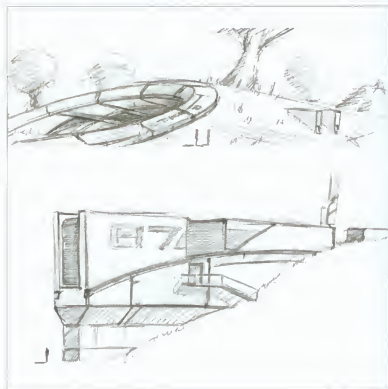
EDEN PRIME

In the first concepts, the human colony of Eden Prime was shown in its natural state, with rolling green hills of farmland. This scheme was used for developing early prototypes of Mass Effect (below). As it became necessary to set a darker tone at the beginning of the story, colors on this planet shifted to a red palette with burning embers raining from the sky.



EDEN PRIME

Early layouts featured a tall bridge that transferred cargo between enormous towers. While this bridge was eventually removed, the final version of Eden Prime would still involve a cargo train.

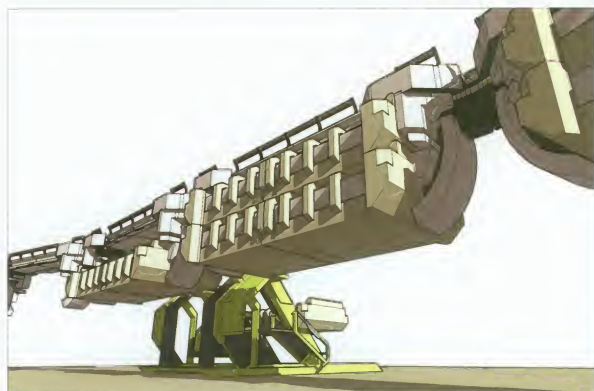
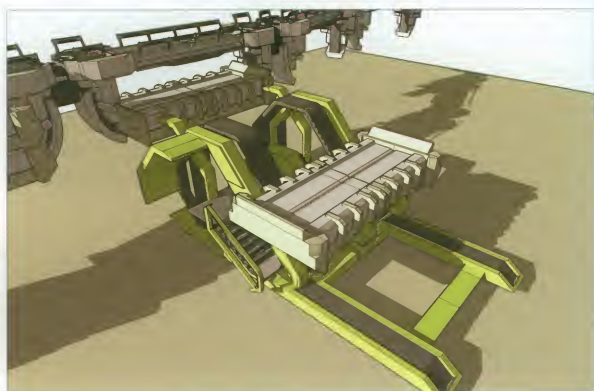
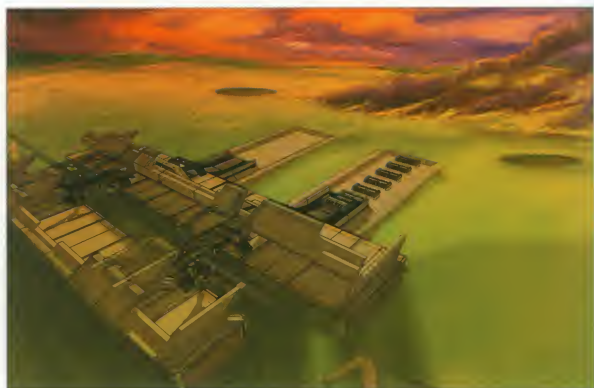


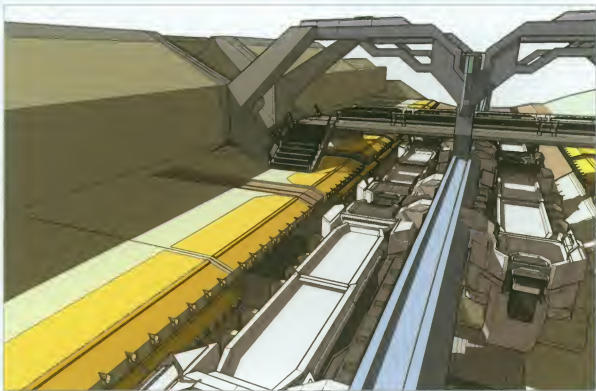
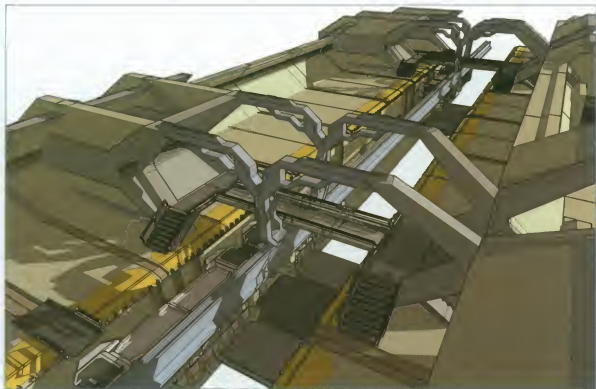


EDEN PRIME

In this "after" shot, it's clear how much damage has been done to the planet by the arrival of Sovereign. The sky is clogged with smoke and entire buildings sheared in half. On the ground, the enormous ships' powerful engines have left a huge circle of burning crops.







EDEN PRIME
TRAIN STATION

This complex structure would not only have to appear functional, but also offer useful combat positions for the fight that would take place there.

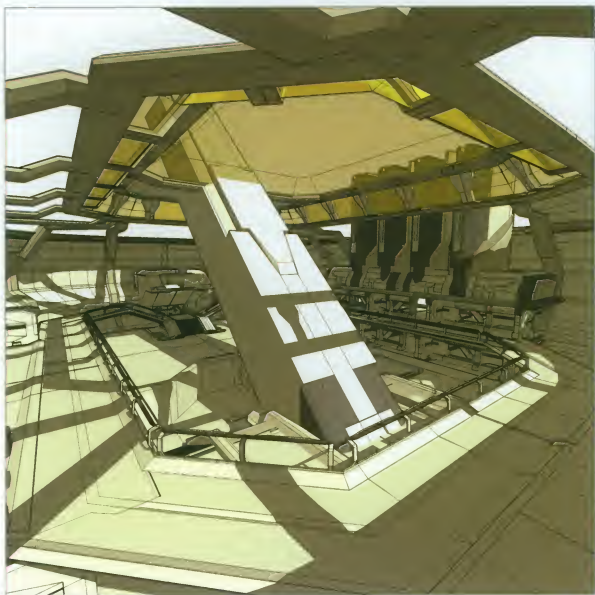
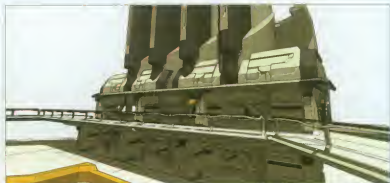




THERUM MINING COMPLEX

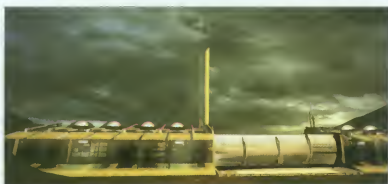
In early story drafts, Therum had a mining facility with a wide atrium (above), complete with a seedy bar.





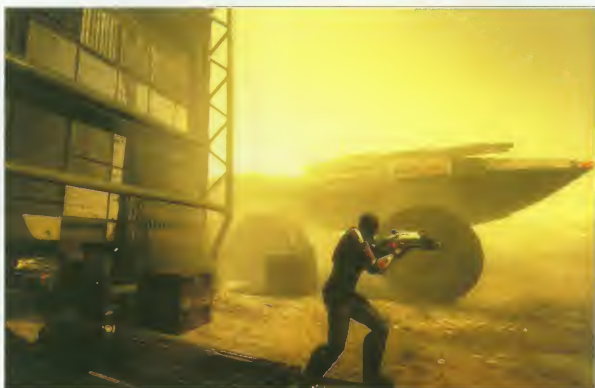
THERUM MINES

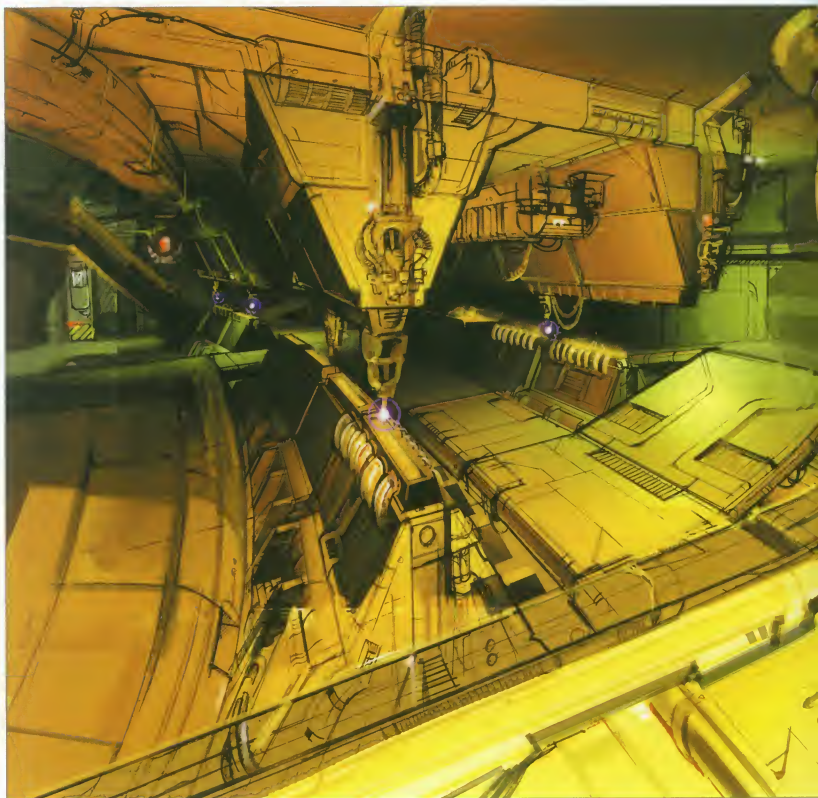
While much of the mining equipment was actually used in *Mass Effect*, some of the interiors were ultimately not required by the story.



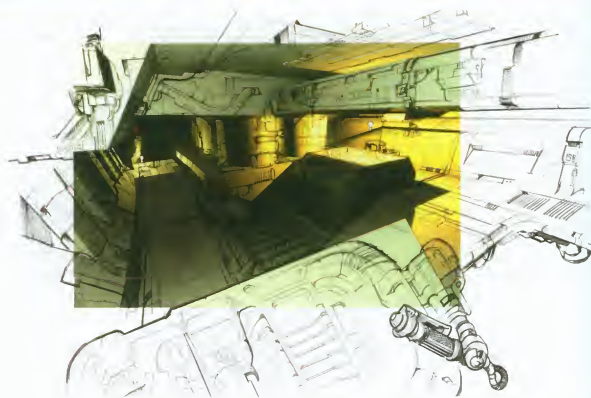
THERUM MINES

Silos and gatehouses created a sense of heavy industry on Therum.





MINING EQUIPMENT

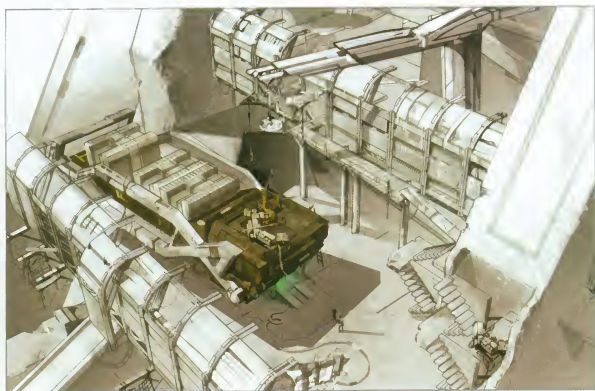




PROTHEAN RUINS

Liara is discovered inside a huge, long-buried Prothean tower. Only part of it was excavated, revealing its tremendous size.





FEROS

A small human colony amid the ancient ruins of a Protomean city, its combination of architectural styles with a destroyed look was particularly difficult to lock down.

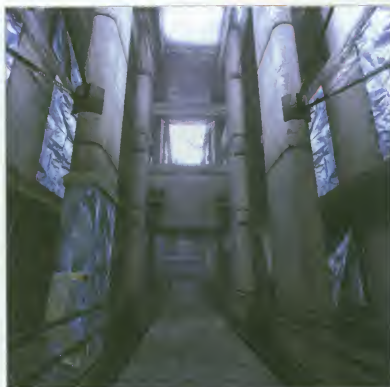
THORIAN LAIR

Living beneath the human colony, the gigantic Thorian flangs from the ruins on long tentacles (opposite)



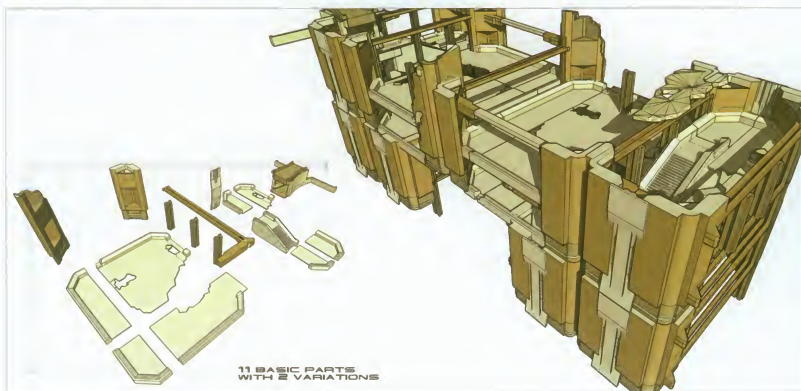
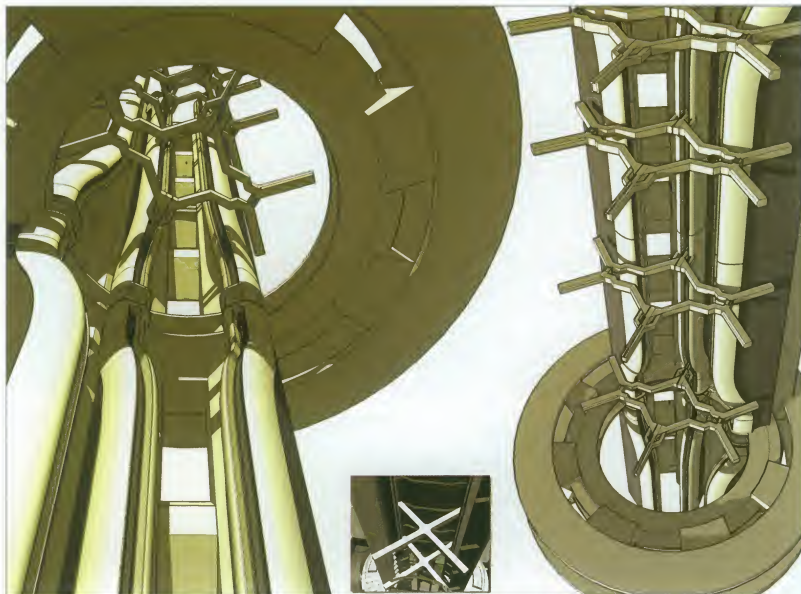
FEROS

These rough 3-D models illustrate the complexity of the world. With rubble and debris forming much of the environment, it was a challenge to ensure that players would know where they were, and where they needed to go.



FEROS

While rough 3-D models helped sort out geometric problems for areas like the Thorian lair, materials and lighting were applied to portions of the level to lock down a final "look." The reflective foil that lines the walls is presumably the remains of ancient insulation, but was inspired by the gold foil that covers many real-life spacecraft.



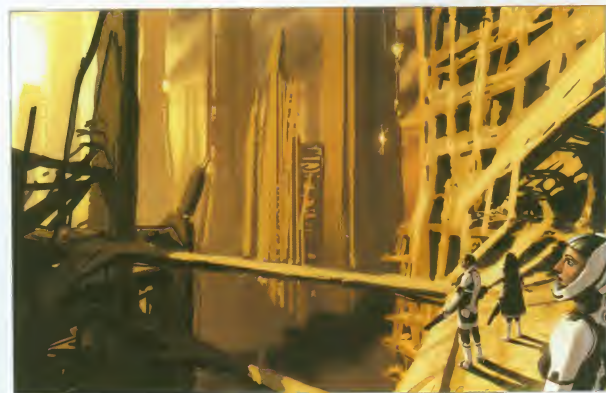
FEROS

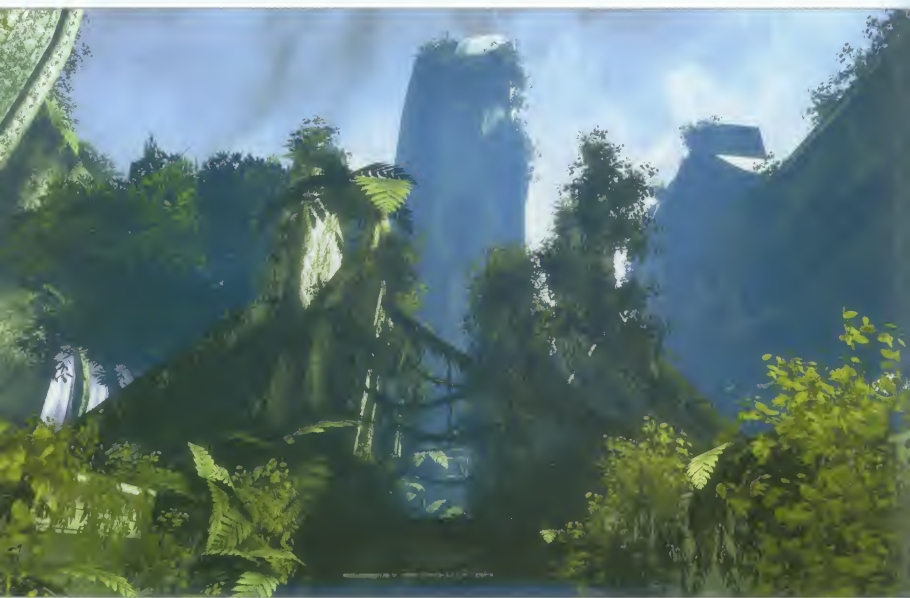
Despite its irregular appearance, much of Feros was made with re-usable parts, making it easier to build and less demanding on memory. To test re-usability, the parts were first modeled and assembled in a blocky form.



FEROS

As the 3-D level art took shape, it continued to bear a strong resemblance to the initial painted concept of Feros (below). Later, the artists pushed for an ever higher visual quality, while the color palette shifted into a high-contrast blue-grey scheme.

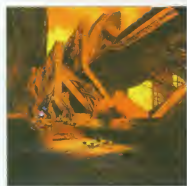
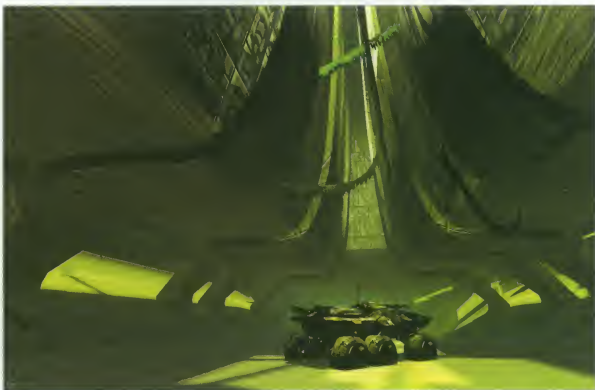




ILOS

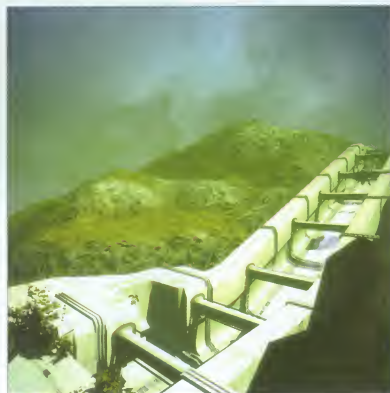
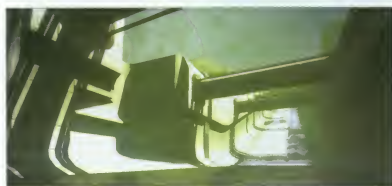
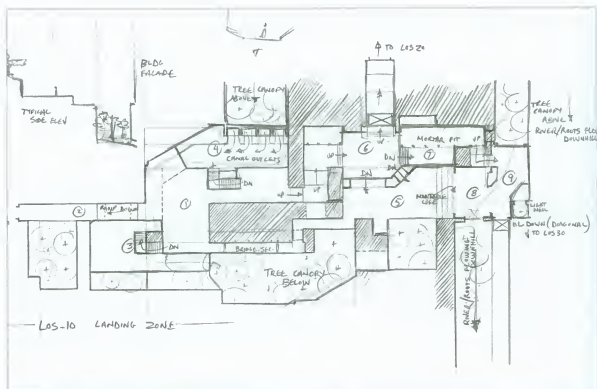
Throughout most of Mass Effect's development, Ilos was a lush jungle world, an idyllic planet whose Prothean inhabitants had long since vanished (above). But as the setting for the dark beginning to the third act of the story, it needed a more ominous feel.

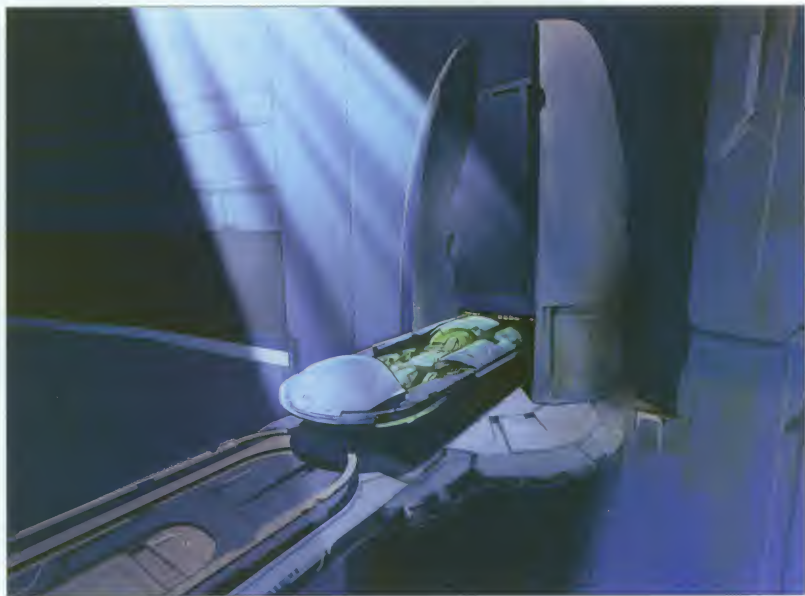
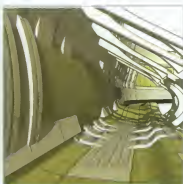
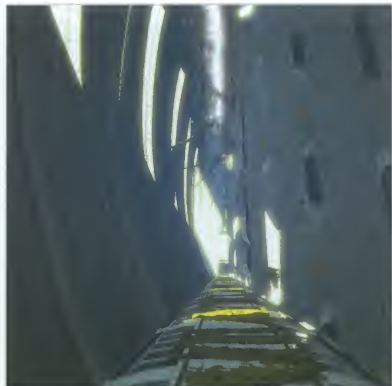




ILOS

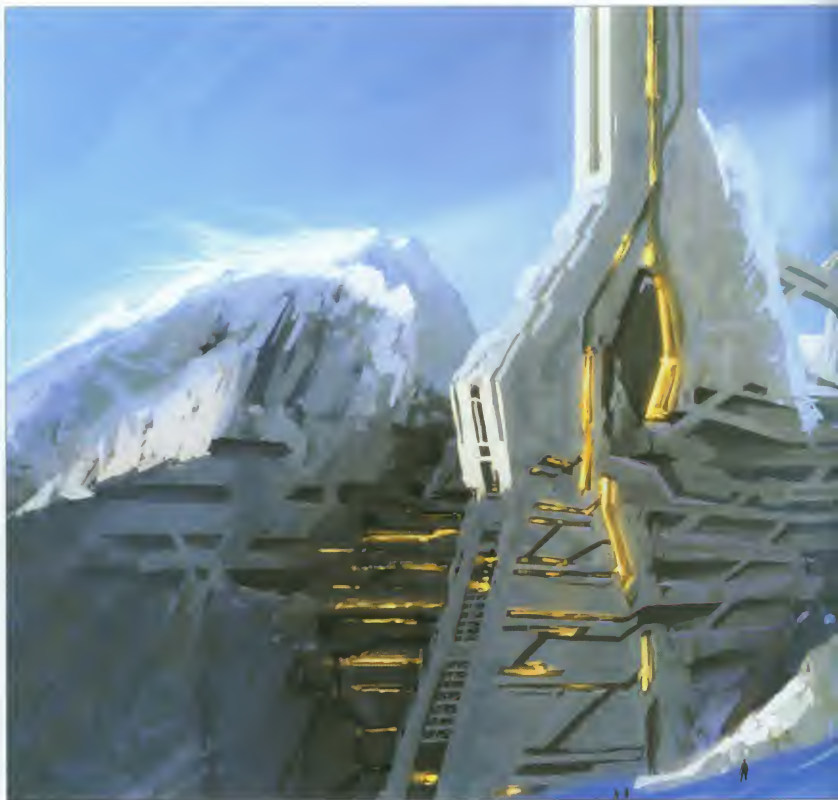
These early 3-D models of the environment show the development of the Prothean aqueducts and the Archive. The near-final color scheme (bottom) makes use of dried and twisted vines, as well as an orange color palette with green mid-tones that makes the area feel unsettling and "dead."





ILOS ARCHIVE

The Archive housed the bodies of thousands of Protheans in suspended animation. Though they were to be awakened when rescued, no rescue occurred. This area was meant to simultaneously capture a sense of wondrous scale and deep sadness.

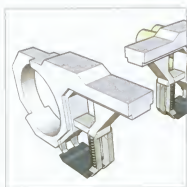


NOVERIA

Initial designs for *Noveria* were heavily inspired by the idea of a spaceport in the Swiss Alps. But as the story became more detailed, the snowstorm was intensified and the wooden materials were changed to exposed concrete to create a colder, isolated feeling.

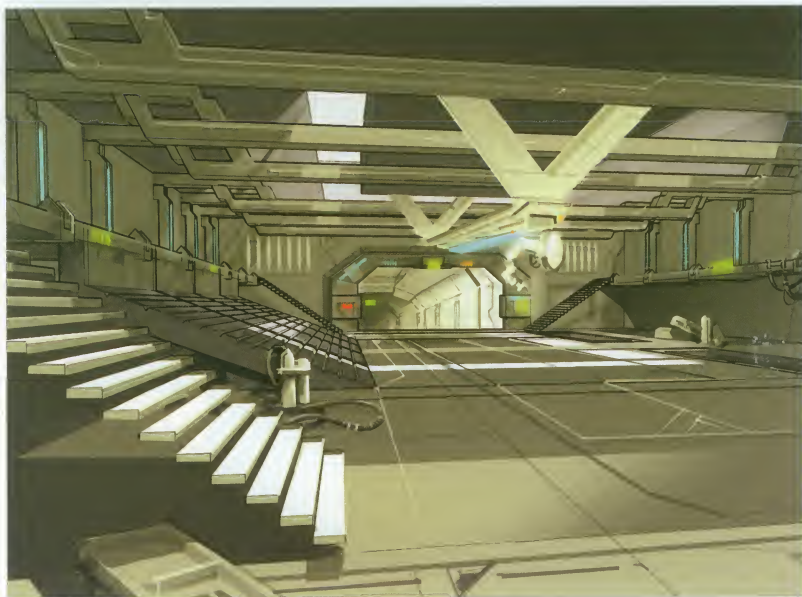
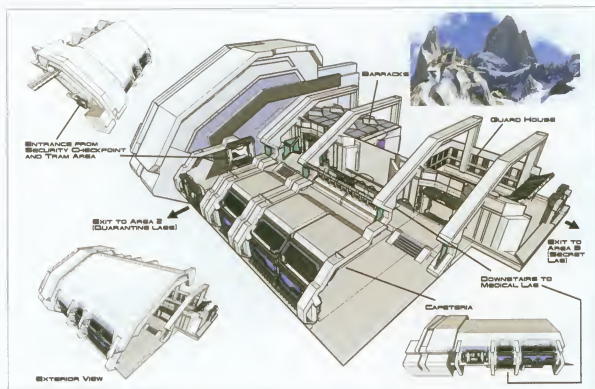


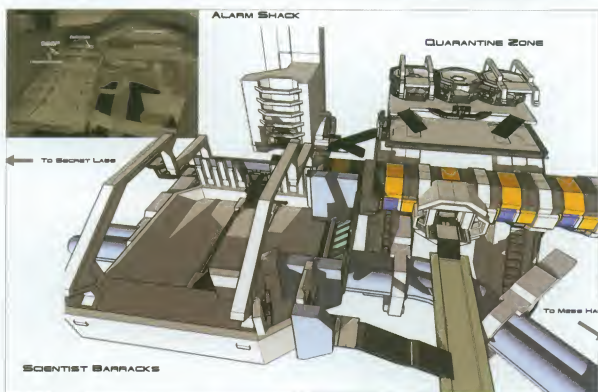
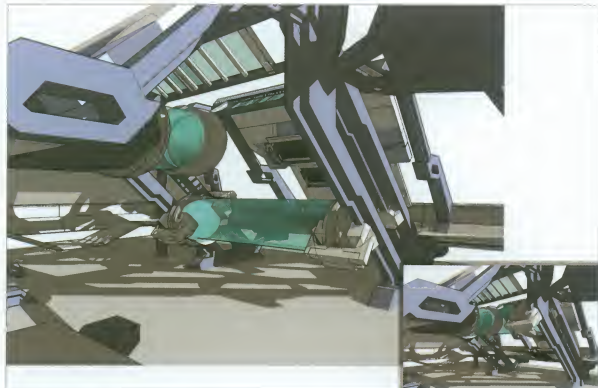




NOVERIA

Though the structures of Noveria were planned in great detail, they were rearranged several times to optimize the story and combat.

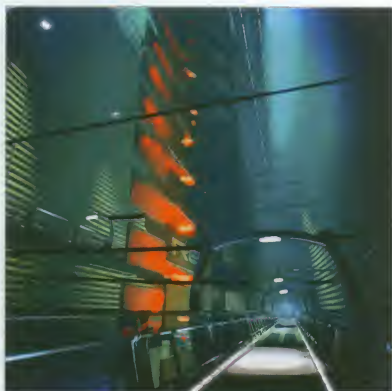
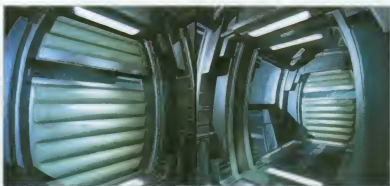






NOVERIA

Early concepts for the Mira computer (above) and a generic hallway section (right). Even though many of the locations on Noveria are underground, the hallways feature windows that reveal the dim blue glow of the icy cavern walls outside.

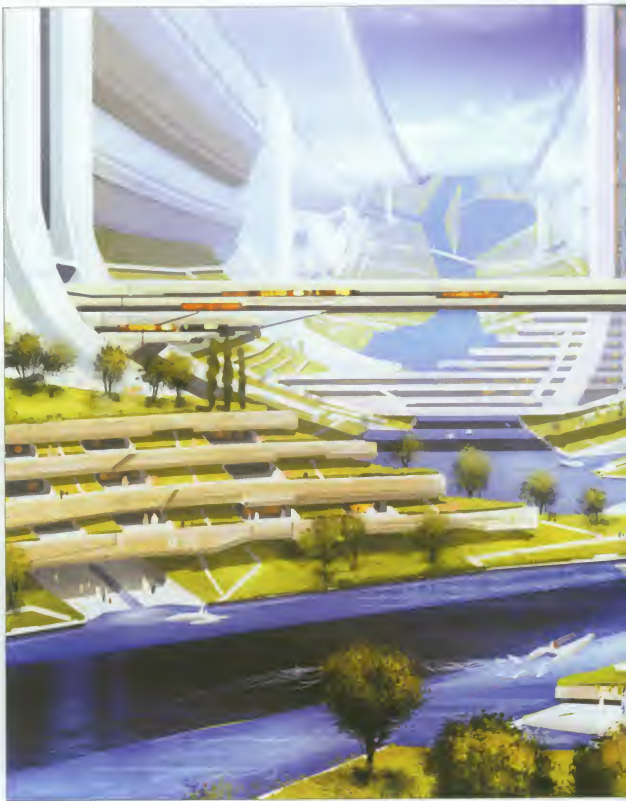


NOVERIA

These early screenshots show the development of the ice and wall materials that would eventually give Noveria its unique look.

THE CITADEL -PRESIDIUM

The Presidium was inspired by a classic idea from science fiction: the ring-shaped space station. In *Mass Effect*, this circular environment blends sleek architecture with natural features, such as trees and a winding shoreline, where the political elite of the galaxy can discuss matters of the highest importance. High above, a holographic sky completes the "outdoors" feel.



THE CITADEL

Whereas the Presidium has an open and airy feeling, other areas of the Citadel are more cramped, resembling city streets and office buildings.





THE CITADEL -APARTMENTS

Although this area was never built, this painting captured the cosmopolitan lifestyle that would be enjoyed by those who live and work on the Citadel.



THE CITADEL -DOCKING BAYS

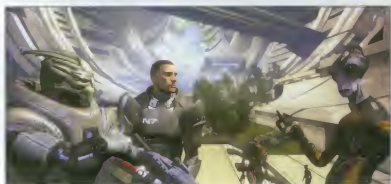
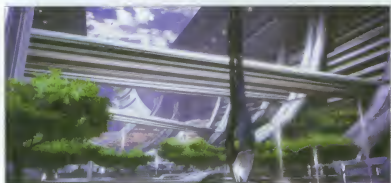
With a sheet of energy holding the air inside these large bays, the entire Citadel can be seen beyond the docking arm in a stunning vista. These rough 3-D models helped work out the angles and dimensions that would allow the Normandy to approach while showing off this amazing view.





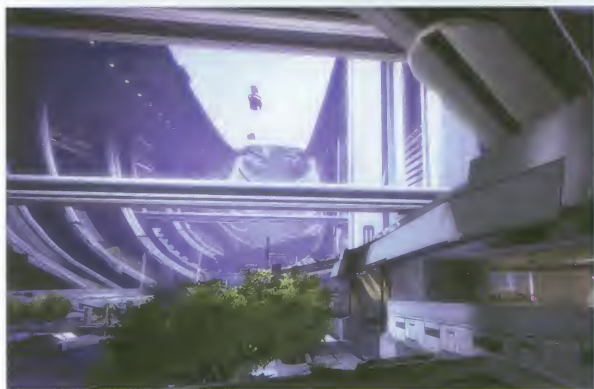
THE CITADEL

A large number of different architectural schemes had to be developed to provide opportunities for exploring the Citadel's diverse locations.



THE CITADEL-EXTERIOR

Though it wasn't always needed, it was useful to know how the entire structure worked, including how the joints moved when it folded into its defensive shell, and how transportation systems would carry millions of citizens around the Citadel.

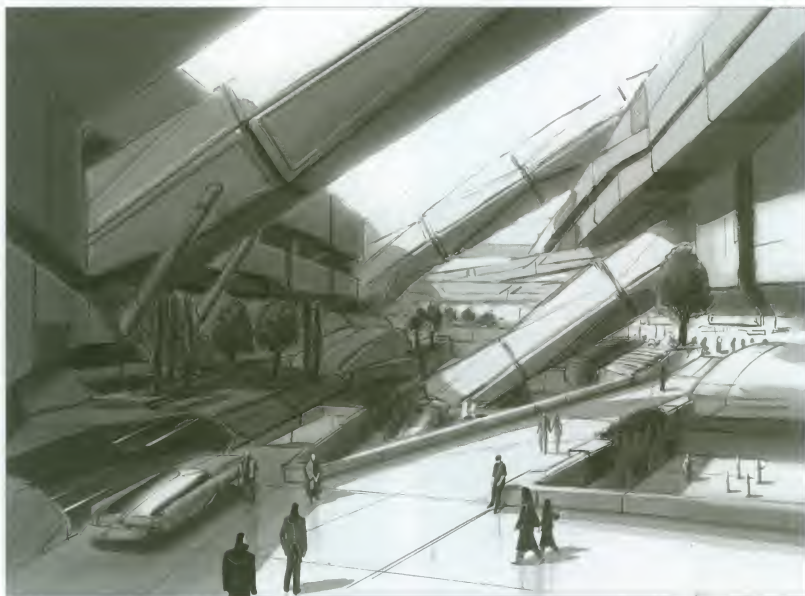




THE CITADEL-PRESIDIUM TOWER

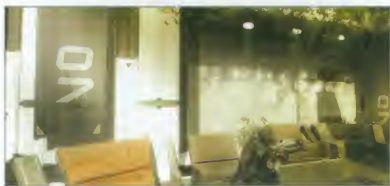
At the center of the Citadel, the Presidium Tower holds the pinnacle of galactic power: the Citadel Council (left).

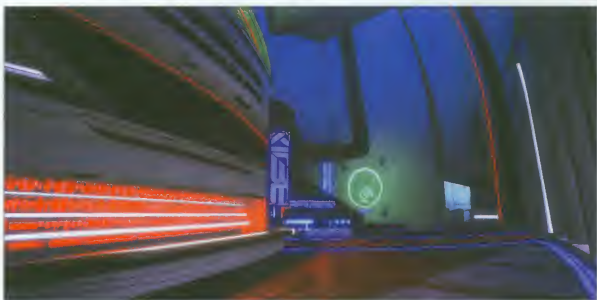




THE CITADEL

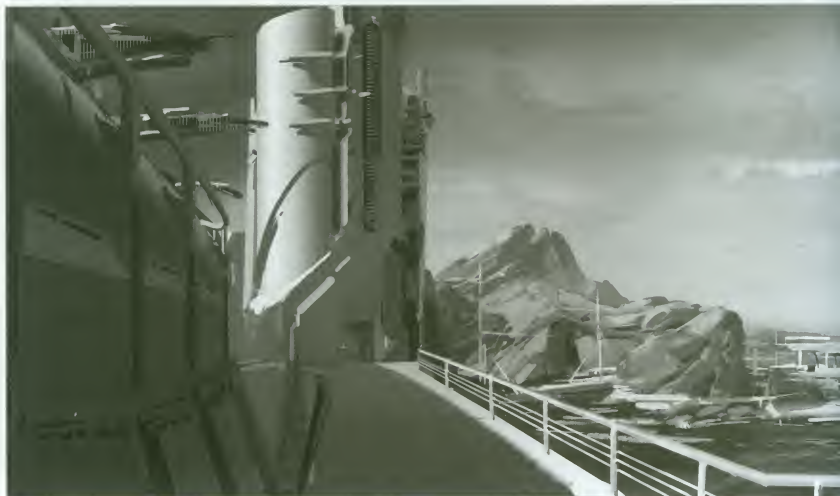
Marker renders (top) established the basic structural shapes while 3-D models allowed final materials and colors to be defined (bottom).





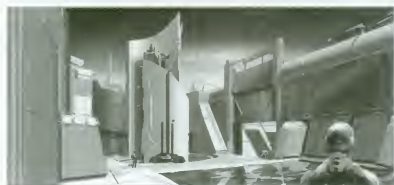
THE CITADEL

Whereas both the Presidium and Council areas used a limited color palette, the "grungier" areas of the station used saturated colors and high-contrast lighting to capture the feel of a city at night.



VIRMIRE

Inspired by the uniquely-shaped islands of Palau, Virumire is the location of Saren's oceanfront fortress. The combination of white-painted concrete, lush tropical vegetation, and stormy skies creates a memorable atmosphere for the assault that leads players through a series of important revelations.



VIRMIRE

Painted-over screenshots of blocky versions of the level, these concepts helped artists define the details, lighting, and materials that would eventually be added (middle, right). Even though these quickly-drawn paintings lack color, the mood of each area is strongly portrayed.





VIRMIRE

For each different type of area, artists created an entirely new set of materials and details. For Virmire, rusted metals and weathered paint were applied to structures, while detailed railings, steps, and cable anchors were built for this tropical location.

The concept art that is the focus of this book was produced by the following artists, without whom this unique vision of the future would not have been possible.

Derek Watts

Matthew Rhodes

Sung Kim

Adrien Cho

Fran Gaultin

Mike Spalding

Mike Trotter

Michael Jeffrey

Sasha Beliaev

Mike Higgins



